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ABSTRACT

Descriptions of family counseling programs in schools and other settings are presented. The program models include different group and individual counseling structures and different goals in work with families. Guides to the development of a program within the school guidance setting are included. (Author)

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REVIEW

SERIES 3

Human Resources in The Guidance Programs

FAMILY COUNSELING

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PERSONNEL SERVICES REVIEW

Series 3
"Human Resources in the Guidance Programs"

Family Counseling

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FORWARD

The Personnel Services Review is an ongoing publication Series which has been developed by CAPS to inform personnel workers about new developments in a number of personnel services areas. There will be several different series of the Personnel Services Review. Each series will focus on a broad area of personnel work practice. Within each series there will be a number of specific issues (varying from five to ten depending on the series). Each of these issues will concentrate on a specific practice, procedure or method. The goal of these publications is to enable the reader to: (1) become aware of a practice, procedure or method, (2) learn about the ways in which this practice has been applied by others, (3) understand the underlying theory behind the practice, (4) consider possible applications of the practice in a variety of settings, and (5) consider ways that the practice might be implemented in his own personnel work program.

This particular Personnel Services Review Series is entitled "Human Resources in the Guidance Programs." The series will contain about five issues. Each issue will focus on people who are available to participate with the counselor in the school guidance program. Program models for involving families, students, teachers, paraprofessionals, and other community members in guidance and counseling activities will be considered. The series is intended to suggest ways that counselors and student personnel workers on the elementary, secondary, and/or college level may expand their activities and develop new programs through communicating, and actively working with other significant people.

FAMILY COUNSELING

DO YOU RECOGNIZE THESE CONCERNS?

Have you found it difficult to help a particular child because his family was placing him in an untenable or unacceptable role?

Have you encountered parents with a sincere interest in helping their child in school or personal problems, but have little idea of ways to help?

Have you found your efforts with a particular student defeated because he encounters contradictions each time he returns to the family milieu?

Have you felt that the only way to help a particular student with school achievement problems is to influence the parent-child relationship which is affecting the problems?

Have you desired more parent concern and participation in the school, particularly in the pupil personnel services?

Have you found that conferences and contacts with one parent do not accurately reveal the home situation or do not give adequate understanding of a student's problem?

WHAT IS FAMILY COUNSELING?

The family is an important, available resource for the counselor who wishes to link school and home in a concerted effort on behalf of the student. Family counseling programs may invite parents of particular students to participate in small group sessions with one or two counselors, or they may invite an entire family to meet with one counselor. The goals of such sessions are to increase communication within the family, to better understand the child's problems, and to offer group support to families working through particular problems.

MODELS OF PRACTICE

The following programs show various goals, techniques, and focuses which have been successful in working with families in counseling settings.

Family Group Consultation (FGC) originated six years ago at the Outpatient Clinic of the University of Oregon Medical School. After the initial year of development, the program became a part of the graduate counselor education program in NDEA Institutes and focused on school settings. Emphasis of the program is upon "helping the family learn about its means of communication with one another so that individuals within the family may achieve a higher level of pro-

ductivity in whatever area(s) concerns them (Fullmer & Bernard, 1968, p. 45)."

Families referred or self-motivated are interviewed in an initial session with one or more counselors. The purpose of this screening interview is to gather information and to explain the program. If the family wishes to continue, a personal contract is established for specific procedures and counseling sessions. The intake stage may take up to three meetings to establish methods of communication to be employed and the implications to a family of continuing consultation. It is a time for determining whether the family will be seen as a single unit or in a group with other families and how many members will receive concurrent individual counseling.

Two or three families are placed in a group with one or more counselors. Often one counselor plus two counselor trainees comprise the staff for a group. The groups meet for weekly two-hour sessions--one hour as a total group and one hour divided into two subgroups (parents and children). If the children represent a wide range of ages, more than one subgroup of children may be advisable. In the group sessions families are encouraged to recognize, accept, and support the differences among members and to develop a common language between the counselors and the family members. The goals within the group process are: (1) to deal with specific, concrete events; (2) to accept, understand, and maintain feeling tone: (3) to deal with the feeling or problem in personal terms of "I"; and (4) to stay in the present--here and now.

Evaluation of the program shows that increased communication and interaction among family members develops and aids in working out specific problems. There is also the support and acceptance of other group members to build confidence in facing problems (Fullmer & Bernard, 1968).

The Adlerian Model of family counseling emphasizes three interrelated groups of children, parents, and teachers. It is based upon Alfred Adler's premise that maladjustment means mistaken approaches to finding one's place in a group, i.e., the problems of all children are essentially social as they try to belong to the family, peer, and other groups.

Elements in the group counseling process are: (1) the establishment and maintenance of proper relationships, including the counselor as group leader with mutual respect among all members; (2) an examination of the purpose of each group member's action or behavior; (3) revealing through group interaction the individual's mistaken goals or motives (this comes most easily when group members have common problems); and (4) a reorientation and redirection by the individual through insight on behavior gained in the group and improved interpersonal relationships and group support. (Sonstegaard & Dreikurs, 1967).

The group counseling should be an integral part of the total school counseling program with the approval and support of all, not an adjunct to the regular program. Planning and orientation with all school personnel is emphasized as necessary to the success of the program. After the orientation, children who would benefit are selected and their parents invited to participate. Teacher willingness to participate is also very important because they become involved in the parent counseling sessions. The method used is interviewing one parent in front of other group members to provide data on why a child behaves as he does. The teacher is then asked to relate what she has observed. Then, all parents and teachers participate in discussion of the case. The counselor is seeing the child in a peer group counseling session and can offer further data and interpretations of behavior.

Sessions for parents begin with an introductory meeting where rationale and procedures are explained, questions answered and a voluntary commitment made. Usually evening meetings of one-and-a-half hours are scheduled. Once a rapport has been established, the interview with selected parents before the group is carefully structured. The parents may be asked to describe the routine of a typical day--behavior of the child and reactions or actions of the parents. The counselor continually includes other parents in the group in this discussion. Then, the counseled parents are asked to leave the room and the children are brought in to clarify hypotheses made about the children's goals. After the children talk, the playroom director may contribute observations about the children in play situations and the teacher may describe the children's classroom behavior. The parent group is then asked for action suggestions and these are discussed and sorted according to significance. (Sonstegaard & Dreikurs, 1967).

The IRRCOPPS Model

A three-year study on guidance objectives by Merville Shaw and others included group counseling with parents. A total of 53 parent counseling groups were held in the six participating school districts. Parents of first, seventh, and ninth graders were invited to participate in small group discussions. It was emphasized that this would not be a lecture series, but a discussion

group focusing upon concerns parents have about their growing children. At the ninth grade level, the focus was more on educational and vocational decision-making. The group leaders or counselors were representative of the various pupil personnel specialties.

The counseling groups for parents of elementary school children were held in three series of four sessions each so parents could choose to participate in four, eight, or twelve sessions. At the high school level, parents could choose between seven or twelve sessions. Evaluation conducted at the end of each series showed the parents who attended more sessions had more positive response to the sessions. Most parents would recommend the group experience to their friends, although few perceived changes in their children's behavior as a result of the counseling.

The main concern of this study was establishing models for pupil personnel services and obtaining research based on the models. The group counseling with parents was one phase of the project. Several monographs in the bibliography of this paper offer extensive evaluation of the program. (Rector & Shaw, 1966; Shaw & Rector, 1968; Shaw & Tuel, 1965.)

Two programs emphasized parent education more than counseling therapy. Tiegland chose parents of fifth grade underachievers for seven structured contacts. Doctoral students in counseling with previous counseling experience presented information to the parent groups. The following topics were the focus of the meetings: a) child development; b) intellectual curiosity; c) discipline; d) childhood responsibility; e) sibling rivalry; f) parental reactions to the meetings; and g) evaluation. The parent program was followed by an evaluation of change in the child's achievement which showed no significant differences. (Tiegland, Grosz, & Boyles, 1967.)

Regal and Rizer screened a group of 52 families in the Vancouver School District whose children were underachievers. The method of contacting families was through mass media and then those who responded were screened to establish underachievement and parent commitment. The mothers met as a single group weekly for seventeen weeks. The meetings focused upon principles and techniques of the teaching-learning process. The intent of the instructors was to teach skills. The mothers also met for an individual interview once every other week. The purpose of these interviews was to help each mother apply the general information of the group to her family. The program was evaluated by testing the childrens' reading and arithmetic achievement gains. Results showed that 58 per cent of the children made significant gains (criterion was twice the normal gain or better) (Robinson & Pettit, 1966).

Robinson and Pettit studied different methods of working with parents of underachievers. This was in part an extension of the Regal and Rizer study. Probable underachieving fourth graders were identified and their mothers were invited to an orientation meeting. Approximately half of the mothers responded. The highly anxious mothers were identified through a self-analysis form. These mothers were then scattered through the three experimental groups. A guidance group emphasized information given to the mothers on methods of teaching modern mathematics and reading. Another group emphasized group dynamics and used the techniques of beginning T-groups. A third group combined an abbreviated version of the content material of Group I with the personal expression and interaction of Group II. Eleven meetings were held following the initial orientation and testing sessions. The mothers were then retested to determine attitude changes. The children were retested to determine if changes of academic performance had resulted. No definitive statements concerning the effectiveness of the different group methods could be made from the results. Changes in the children's academic performance suggested influence from the mother's experience, but not enough to be conclusive. It was concluded that such group experience for mothers is beneficial and it suggested the importance of involving fathers in such a program (1966).

An evening counseling program was established in the New Rochelle Public Schools for parents of underachievers living in poor neighborhoods. The parents met for counseling at the same time as the adult education classes in the school. The program focused upon increasing the parent's awareness of the student's interests, abilities, and aptitudes, and upon isolating some of the stumbling blocks to the student's progress.

Families of selected ninth graders were requested to meet with a counselor for a personal interview. An information form on family and student concerns was completed and orientation of the purposes of the project given. This first interview was followed with an exploratory session with the high school guidance staff and a personal interview with the counseling psychologist. Each family had from one to six individual conferences with staff members. Seven group sessions of two hours

each focused on information about college entrance requirements, scholarships, motivation, adolescent adjustment, and the role of the school counselor. A team approach with two or three counselors and a psychologist proved successful. Each counselor saw the family separately and then met for discussion and planning. The team member with the best relationship with the family continued to see them. An evaluation of the program by participant families, students, and a ninth grade counselor brought positive responses. Over five years, the program has been enlarged to cover grades five through eleven. Emphasis has been placed upon understanding the student's environment as displayed by the families and upon the need of students to deal with the problem of underachievement in personal terms (Zweibelson, 1965).

Another program designed to help families deal with school learning problems used a 60-90 minute interview. Robert Friedman describes the interview as structured with emphasis on authority, confrontation, and directiveness. A specific series of questions which focuses on the school achievement problems is used to start the interview. For example, the parent is asked "What do you expect of your child in school?" This is repeated until a specific, direct response comes. The child is asked a similar question to see what communication has been established between parent and child. These questions elicit specific responses on expectations, disappointments, and action behavior from both parents and child. Data from 53 interviews is presented in nine diagnostic categories dealing with family systems, relationships, and communication factors. From the family dynamics revealed in the interview, diagnosis of the ways to help school achievement is made. A partial tutoring lesson between parent and child or interviewer and child may be used to illustrate the problems being discussed. The interviewer must be sensitive to feelings within the session and the need for followup after this confrontation interview.

Charles Brinton counseled parents of junior high underachievers in an extension of an earlier study by John Gilmore of Boston University. Thirty students were identified as underachievers by Otis score and grade point average and divided into an experimental group whose parents were counseled and a control group. The groups were matched in IQ, socioeconomic status, number of siblings, and scores on attitude measures. An initial interview with parents who agreed to participate outlined the program and requested permission to tape record all sessions. The parents met together as a group for 15 half-hour weekly sessions, most of them in the evening so fathers could be included. The focus of the counseling was upon helping parents communicate more positive feelings toward the child with the counselor making many types of concrete suggestions. In addition, general education problems which demanded parental attention were discussed and suggestion for changed parental behavior made. Results of this study showed that the students whose parents were counseled improved significantly in grade point average and in attitudes toward parents. No significant differences were found in achievement motivation (Brinton, 1969).

In The School Counselor, May 1968, Patricia Mallars discusses parent group counseling in the Stockton, California, Unified School District. Ten to twelve week sessions were held with parents of handicapped or underachieving students. The article makes practical suggestions to the counselor considering a parent counseling program and also discusses briefly counselor role in such programs.

NON-SCHOOL MODELS

A crisis-centered approach was used with families of suicidal children by the Central Psychiatric Clinic in Cincinnati, Ohio. The child's threat or attempt of suicide was viewed as effective, but incomplete communication of personal stress. An initial interview with all family members and the clinic team focused on a definition of the child's specific problem and consideration of some methods of coping with the crisis. In successive interviews, the family situation and problems in family relationships which have contributed to the crisis, were evaluated. The number of interviews ranged from one to eight with referral to other types of treatment made if necessary. In the interviews, the clinic team which includes a child psychiatrist and social worker attempts to identify events which provoked the crisis and ways in which each member's behavior interfered with communication. The team meets for discussion and planning on the case within two days after the initial interview. This program is mentioned because of the emphasis on faulty communication within the family and the view of symptoms such as school truancy, promiscuity, and suicide wishes as attempts at establishing that communication. The use of the team approach in counseling and planning is also repeated in other more school related projects (Morrison & Collier).

Parents of adolescent patients in a psychiatric ward took part in a group counseling program. The adolescents were in the hospital for short terms usually because of

"acting out" or similar behavior. Ten couples (two groups of five) participated in weekly sessions for four months. The co-therapists were a male resident doctor and a female psychiatric social worker. The use of co-therapists is discussed in the program report. It was found that the parents often identified the therapists as father and mother figures with some transference taking place. The group process had three phases in this program. In the initial phase, the parents expressed feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety over their child's illness and discussed the defenses of blaming outside forces for the illness. In the working phase of the group, the focus was upon better methods of dealing with the child. Problems of limit-setting, dependence-independence, and sexual identity were discussed. The parents' own upbringing and its influence on the family was also discussed. The final phase of the group was gradual termination with personal evaluation and reassessment of family situations made. The group approach was seen as providing parents with increased involvement in the child's treatment, mutual support, greater self-esteem, and increased communication.

Another program for parents selected only those whose children had been diagnosed as perceptually handicapped. The group of 10 to 12 parents met every other week for eight sessions of one-and-one-half hours. Requirements for the group were: 1) a 10 dollar fee of commitment; 2) children represented ranged no more than four years in grade level; and 3) the parents were at the same level of knowledge about perceptual handicaps. The group focused upon factual knowledge about the handicap, discussing feelings concerning the child, and sharing useful techniques of management. The program report contains quotations from parents which tell how the experience was beneficial (Barman).

One other family program is worth mentioning because of the method of initiation used. The Menninger Foundation developed an "active intervention" with low income families. A man/woman team went into low income neighborhoods and randomly knocked on doors offering help to families. The team found the method successful when they consciously avoided mannerisms and appearances of professional workers. They sought to establish rapport with the families on common grounds of pets, children, home maintenance problems, etc. Once rapport was established, families were invited to the clinic or offered help in their own environment. Emphasis of the treatment was upon the family's immediate social problems. The methods were successful in overcoming some of the defenses often encountered in working with the poor (Taylor, 1966).

GENERALIZATIONS

1. There is evidence that the parent-child relationship is a basic variable of achievement. A means of understanding and influencing this relationship is offered by family counseling, especially in working with underachievers.

2. Family communication patterns and systems are often self-defeating. A family member may have been placed in an untenable role or may be receiving support for behavior which is really unacceptable. Family counseling offers a way to look at all members' perceptions of roles and behaviors. Contradictory styles of communication may be causing confusion.

3. Parent-child relationship is two-way and each needs to understand and respect the other's rights and values.

4. Parents have been blamed at length for their children's problems and are highly sensitive. Group counseling offers a supportive atmosphere of other parents with similar feelings and problems. The group members can help each other understand their children.

5. The family with problems is usually the most isolated. Rarely does any family discuss intimate problems with other families, and the family with serious troubles is usually more isolated than most.

6. Education is becoming more and more a group process. Family counseling offers an active way of working with an important group in which the child is learning.

7. The family may have become focused upon the "problem child" as a means of achieving a certain family cohesiveness or as a defense against other family problems. In such a situation, attempts to deal with the total family relationship will meet strong resistance and may threaten the balance or homeostasis of the family unit.

8. The family member who internalizes his feelings may benefit from group sessions as he receives support for verbalizing his feelings. Even a silent group member

may gain understanding through listening to other family members discuss their perceptions.

9. Two studies suggest parent education groups which are more didactic and directive are an effective means of helping parents help their children with learning problems.

10. Group counseling offers a way to coordinate the efforts of all adults influencing a particular child and/or of various personnel working with a family.

11. A homogeneous group composed of families with similar concerns offers greater group cohesiveness and support for individuals.

12. In counseling with parents, the pupil personnel specialist may find it helpful to establish a common bond as a parent and/or family member himself while still maintaining his professional identity.

13. Co-therapists or co-counselors, male and female, may facilitate communication within a group as each responds to feelings revealed by members. For example, a male counselor may not perceive all the implications of a situation to a mother or may be more critical of a father and vice-versa. Co-counselors are also better able to handle any transference which might occur.

ACTION POSSIBILITIES

1. A counselor working with a number of underachievers in a particular grade level may invite the parents of these students to form a discussion group focusing on ways to help such students.

2. A counselor may see a need for parent education groups which focus upon problems and concerns of a particular age level, i.e. drug use and abuse, vocational decision making, peer relationships.

3. Rather than inviting parents selected by the counselor, the program may be opened to all interested families. Often, a family would welcome a group which offered discussion and support on very normal family problems and did not carry a stigma of "troubled homes" for participation.

4. An on-going program may become crisis-oriented in that members would be welcomed at anytime they were motivated for self-help because of a present crisis, possibly temporary, which required short-term guidance. Such a program would depend on effective publicity so that all families understood its nature and availability.

5. A group counseling program which included peer student groups, teacher groups, and parent groups might become the emphasis of the total school counseling program. This might be especially effective in elementary school where the counselor's role is working with all significant adults in the child's environment.

6. A program of group counseling for families may be combined with opportunities for individual counseling for members who desire both.

IMPLEMENTATION

The following points are suggested as steps in developing an effective program.

1. Goals. It is important to decide what the problem focus will be, i.e., parent concerns, student concerns, or family interaction patterns. This will then suggest a method or emphasis for the group activities. Counseling on interaction and behavior problems, guidance on decision-making process, or education on child development are methods used in the program models.

2. Program Design. Several models have been presented to show different program structures. Decisions need to be made on the following:
   a. Size of each group and whether children will be included.
   b. Length of each meeting-one to two hours seems most popular.
   c. Scheduling meetings--one evening per week may prove feasible.
   d. Concurrent or supportive activities--an opportunity for individual counseling may be one.
   e. Place of the family program in the total guidance program.

3. Staffing. The models suggest group leaders with various training, experience, and orientation have been successful depending upon the focus of the program. The use of male and female counselors is advised in two of the program descriptions.

Providing for supportive staff members, and extra time allotments depends again upon program design, but must be considered before the program begins. The role which the leader will assume in the group may depend upon the goals and concerns of the group and upon the leader's personal style.

4. Program Initiation. A program begins as participants are selected by some established criterion or recruited as volunteers. It may not be possible to serve the seriously troubled families through this type of program, but almost all families have concerns and problems which can be helped by an effective group counseling program. Letters or phone calls usually serve as invitations to parents to participate. The importance of a complete orientation of school administrators, teacher, and families, so that all understand the program's goals and design must be emphasized. It is possible to ask families to make a definite commitment to the program at the orientation session. Some of the models suggest a small fee or registration form as a means of insuring continued participation for the entire program.

5. Evaluation. A counseling program may be evaluated by participant's reactions or objective measures of attitude and behavior change in students and/or parents. The models used opinion surveys, pre-and post-attitude tests, student scholastic achievement gains, and other measurements of program effectiveness.

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